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Harman, Frank P.

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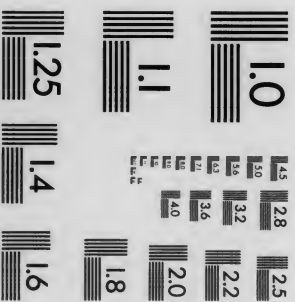
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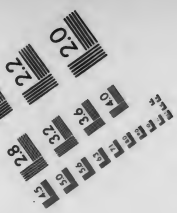
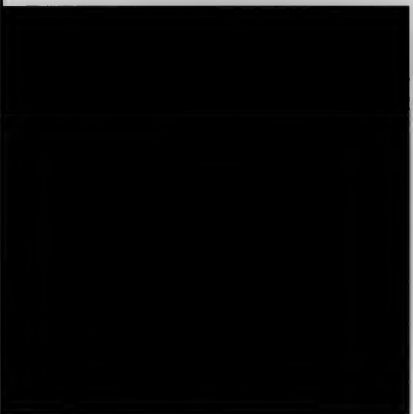
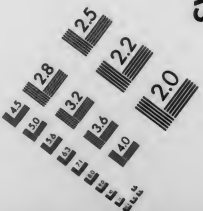
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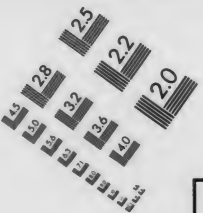
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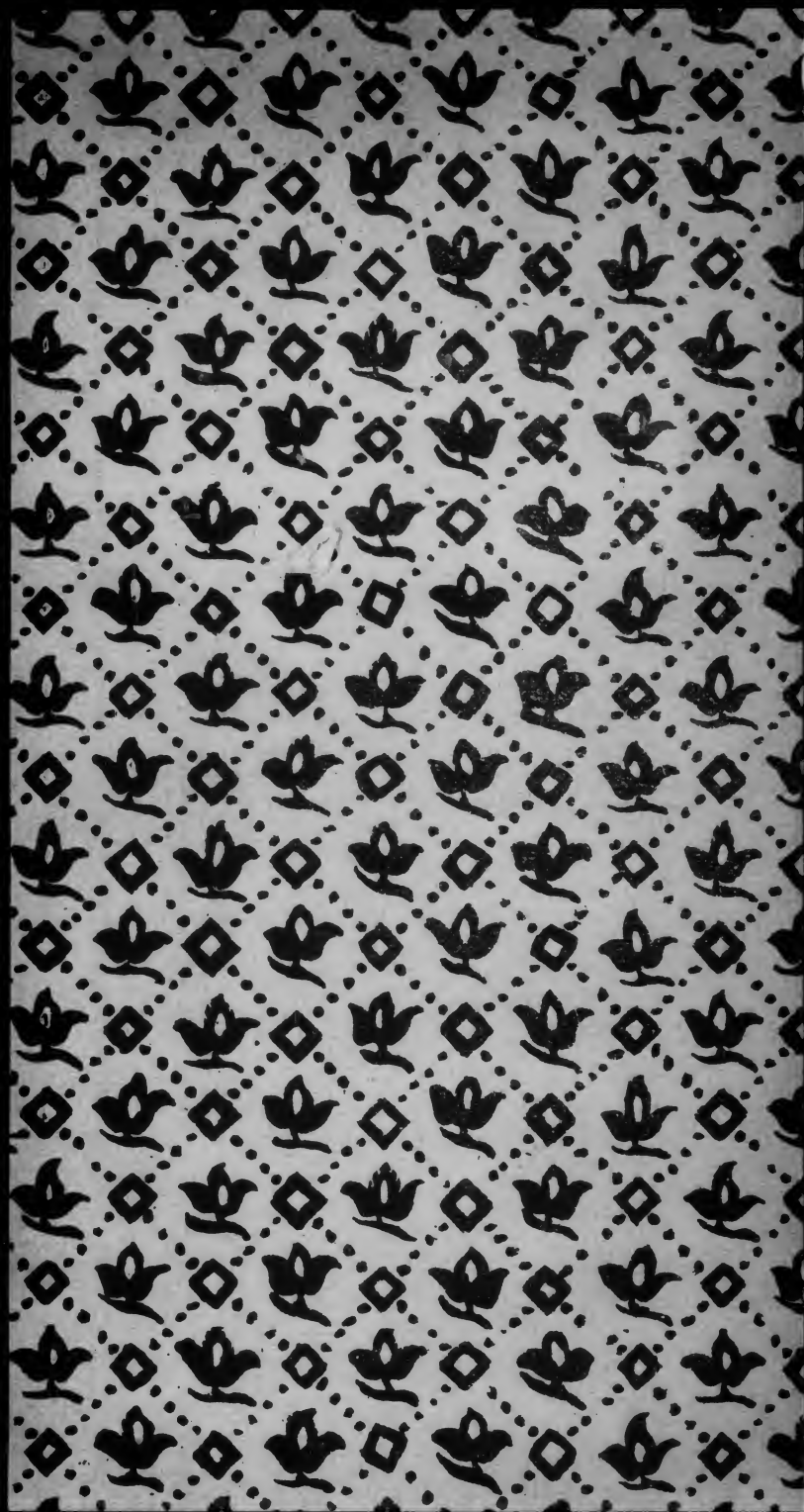
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A REVIEW
OF THE
Pocahontas Strike and its Causes
FROM THE OPERATORS' STANDPOINT.

BY
FRANK P. HARMAN,
Secretary and Treasurer of the Turkey Gap Coal and Coke Company,
AND
Secretary of the Flat Top Coal Association.

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In the *Roanoke Times* May 2d, 1895, reprinted in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, appeared the following article:—

THE OPERATORS' STANDPOINT.

Mr. Frank P. Harman, secretary and treasurer of the Turkey Gap Coal and Coke Company and secretary of the Flat Top Coal Association, makes the following review of the strike and its causes:—

At and previous to May, 1893, the operators received for running mine coal, which may be considered as a standard, 85 cents per ton. At that time the net price received was reduced to 75 cents per ton. Another reduction was made in May, 1894, which brought the net price received per ton by the operators to 72½ cents. This price prevailed up to May, 1895. Up to this time the wages paid by the operators to the miners was 75 cents per carload for room coal and \$1.05 per carload for entry coal, a carload weighing on an average two tons.

The operators had stood these two reductions in the net price received for coal, and had continued all the time paying the same prices to the laborers. An effort was made to maintain the 72½-cent price, which, had it been successful, would have had as a sequence the continuation of the old wages paid to miners.

There are six companies known in that region as "rail-road" companies, as follows: The Southwest Virginia Improvement Company, the Browning Coal and Coke Company, the Houston Coal and Coke Company, the Crozer Coal and Coke Company, the Upland Coal and Coke Company, and the Pulaski Iron Company, who still claim to be running, but as a matter of fact the number of men they are using now amounts to a mere bagatelle.

These companies virtually own their coal lands. In other words, the stockholders in these companies are also the shareholders in the company that owns the lands, and consequently their paying of royalties is like taking a dollar from

one pocket and putting it into the other. These companies, or most of them at least, are contemplating the erection and use of electrical mining machinery. When this is perfected, these "railroad" companies can, taking into view the fact that they work no miners—only a few laborers at the machines, and that they virtually pay no royalties—sell coal at a profit, and at the same time pay the Norfolk and Western Railroad advanced freight rates. The coal of the six companies was offered to the railroad at 65 cents per ton.

The cut in the wages was 15 cents a carload, a car holding two tons, and the reduction in the price was $7\frac{1}{2}$ cents a ton, making the reductions identical, so that it can be seen the reduction in the price paid would not result in any advantage to the operating companies, but only to the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company. The operators claim that the advance in freight rates compelled them to make this cut in wages.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, having the same coal and hauling it the same distance, and being direct competitors of the Norfolk and Western people, charged such freight rates as to net the operators a handsome profit.

The operators admit they have made money at the old prices, but to sell coal for 65 cents per ton and pay the same wages as formerly would cause them all to close out their business. They say, it has been asserted by one of the high officials of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company, that the store business produced profits enough, and that the operators should be satisfied with the commissary gains alone, but the operators claim that such is by no means the case. The operators also assert that the railroad shares a large part of the store profits by having recently raised freight rates from the markets to the coal fields 40 per cent. The assertion that the miners are compelled to purchase goods from the commissaries, they claim, is not the fact, as no one is compelled to deal at the company's store. As the miners are often provident men, and as there are other stores, the trade of the miners goes into various channels.

It has been suggested that the failure of the Norfolk and

Western Railroad Company was due entirely to their unprofitable branch lines, and not to the hauling of coal at low rates.

The agitation among the miners was very strong, and their organization was thorough some time before the operators notified them of the intended reduction in wages, and this state of affairs was brought about, it is said, entirely by the proposed use of the electrical mining machines by the six companies referred to.

This gentleman told the *Times* reporter that he believed the strike would be quite a durable one; that the miners were in possession of considerable money, as they had always been paid well, and at this time of year they were not averse to laying off for awhile.

They had been working steadily for a long time, and few of them objected to going to the country to fish and hunt for awhile.

In the Bluefield *Daily Telegraph* of the 4th instant appears a "review of the strike and its causes from the operators' standpoint," by Mr. Frank P. Harman, secretary and treasurer of the Turkey Gap Coal and Coke Company and secretary of the Flat Top Coal Association, and as the reading public will by this time have digested his statements, it will be well before they draw their conclusions to hear something from another "standpoint," which may tend to moderate their first impressions and consider the matter in a fair and dispassionate manner.

One would have thought that Mr. Harman, occupying the position he does in this coal field, would have fully realized the responsibility of anything he might say, and be especially careful that his statements were strictly true, and give a plain, ungarnished narration of facts. But he has proved painfully disappointing, for a more complete list of misstatements was never compiled. Everything calculated to give plausibility to the "operators' standpoint" was given every prominence, while anything capable of guiding the outside public in forming correct ideas of the controversy were either lightly touched

upon or omitted altogether. Hence the necessity of something being heard from the other side to prevent Mr. Harman from acting as both judge and jury in his own case.

Mr. Harman begins by mentioning the several reductions in the price received by the operators from May, 1893, to May, 1895, and states that the price "at and previous to May, 1893, was 85 cents per ton." Now that is not correct. The price from May, 1889, to May, 1893, was, for railroad coal 75 cents, tidewater coal 75 cents on 300,000 tons, and 85 cents on the remainder, which would net the operators an average price between 75 and 85 cents. In May, 1893, the net price was not, as he states, reduced to 75 cents, but a larger quantity of 75-cent coal was asked for by the railroad company, which reduced the average price somewhat, but kept it above 75 cents, as they were still paid 85 cents for a large proportion of their coal. Mr. Harman is, however, correct in saying the price was reduced in May, 1894, to 72½ cents, and remained at that until May, 1895. He then states that "up to this time (May, 1885) the wages paid to the miners was 75 cents per car for room coal and \$1.05 per car for entry coal, a carload weighing on an average two tons." Now, Mr. Harman knows very well that in the early part of 1894 many if not all the operators reduced the price of entry coal from \$1.05 to 95 cents per car, and forced the prop setting upon the miners. And as for a mine car containing on an average "two tons" of coal, it would be interesting to know Mr. Harman's method of calculating. One ton of Pocahontas run of mine coal occupies a space of about 42 cubic feet, so, if Mr. Harman is correct about an average car containing two tons, then it follows that the capacity of the average mine car in this field is about 84 cubic feet. We will follow this a little further. When the last strike occurred at the mines of the Southwest Company at Pocahontas, in 1892, it was ascertained by the company and a miners' committee that the average capacity was 79¾ cubic feet, and contained by actual weight 2¼ tons. This was the smallest car in the field, and a strike was caused by the company increasing the size to what was considered the standard—92 cubic feet. Now, on a basis of 42 cubic feet

to the ton, the Southwest Company's car having a capacity of 79¾ cubic feet should only have contained 1.89 tons, whereas it was found to contain 2¼ tons. How came this difference of more than one quarter of a ton? By compelling the miners to give heaped up measure and load the cars more than "level full." Then, if the Southwest car, measuring 79¾ cubic feet, contained 2¼ tons of coal and was known to be the smallest car in use, how much coal do the other cars in the field contain when their capacities range from 92 to 120 cubic feet "level full"?

If it is possible for Mr. Harman to be mistaken in his idea of the capacity of the cars, let him give us the length, depth, and cross section of the Turkey Gap car and allow the public to calculate its capacity. If they find it to be as Mr. Harman states, only a modest "two-ton" car measuring 84 cubic feet, its dimensions have certainly shrunk below those of its famous ancestor which existed in the early history of the Turkey Gap operation. The few miners who survived the terrible ordeal of loading that historical car to this day relate their thrilling experience on one occasion of having shoveled coal into it for nearly an hour without being able to see the coal piling above the top of the car. The more they threw in the more it devoured, until, completely exhausted, they told the driver to "take the damned thing out," which he attempted to do, but unfortunately it became tightly jammed between the sides of the break through and could not be moved. The mine boss was sent for, who, realizing the grave situation, promptly summoned Commodore McQuail and his principals to the scene. After a careful investigation was made evidence was found of weak construction; the sides of the car were rather thin, and as the carpenter who built them had not been instructed to put in a tie rod across the top of the car to brace the sides, there was, of course, nothing to oppose the least line of resistance, consequently when the coal was loaded into the car it became inflated, like the frog in the fable. But the aggregation of skill assembled on the spot was able to cope with the difficulty, and the case resolved itself into a choice between widening the break through and entry back to

the drift mouth, or unloading some of the coal out of the car. As the first idea would entail months of expensive labor and practically stop the mine, causing the price of the company's stock to reach a low figure in the market, the latter alternative was reluctantly adopted and the miners ordered to unload some of the coal, which they did, causing the car at once to regain its normal shape. It was then hauled out of the mine, and the miners released from their imprisonment. This is no legendary lore related by the miners to their families to while away the long Winter evenings, but is an actual fact, and this is how Commodore McQuail came to be dubbed by the miners the "Father of the Big Car."

Oh, but Mr. Harman will say, "I speak of the average car of the region; some cars will of course be smaller than 84 cubic feet, and a few might possibly be a trifle larger." Yes, but give us the dimensions of your Turkey Gap car to be going on with; this will give us some idea whether or not the average car is going to figure out a "three-ton" car instead of a two-ton. But we will not raise our expectations too high, but be reasonable, and we have every reason to believe that the average capacity of the mine cars in this field is $2\frac{3}{4}$ tons, calculated up to the height they are compelled to be loaded. To be sure the cars at the different mines do not resemble each other in "shape;" the coal seam getting thinner in the direction of the North Fork and Bottom Creek, the height of the cars had to be reduced. But what was lost in height is fully compensated for in additional length, and especially width, as shown by the gauge of track at some of the mines being as much as 4 feet wide, only $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches narrower than the standard-gauge railroads of the United States.

Mr. Harman next gives a list of six companies which he states "virtually own their own coal lands and pay no royalties." Now, Mr. Harman knows perfectly well that is not true. Probably Crozer's and Upland may do so, but as for the remaining four, they do not own their own coal lands, but mine coal under royalty like the rest of the field. And as for most of these companies introducing electrical machinery into their mines, surely that is no reproach to them. It

is evidence of their having realized the fact that the day of easy prosperity in this as in most other coal fields has passed; that, owing to competition from without and within, they must be able to conform to the altered condition of things and keep abreast with the times; that the successful operation of coal mines is no longer an ordinary trade, admitting of loose methods and rule-of-thumb calculations, but has now reached the exactness of a science.

We now come to the cut in wages Mr. Harman says the operator have been forced to make, but as he does not mention the cut made by the railroad company, this part of his "review" is not very intelligible. The cut made by the railroad company is from $72\frac{1}{2}$ cents to 65 cents, being $7\frac{1}{2}$ cents per ton, or 10 per cent., and Mr. Harman says the operators' cut in wages is identically the same— $7\frac{1}{2}$ cents per ton—and that no advantage will be gained by the operators, but only by the railroad company. But why does Mr. Harman withhold the whole truth about the operators' cut in wages? Why does he only mention the cut on the mine cars, which item alone, according to his own figures, will offset the entire cut of the railroad company? Not a word does he tell the public of the merciless cutting down of every other class of labor, both inside and outside the mines, even extending to the coke yards. Why, it has been carefully estimated that, should the operators succeed in enforcing this scale of reductions, it will amount to 20 per cent., and deduct from this the 10 per cent. cut made by the railroad company, and the operators will be 10 per cent. better off than before. And yet Mr. Harman has the audacity to circulate in the newspapers the outrageous statement that the two cuts of the operators and railroad company are "identical," and that the "reduction in the price paid would not result in any advantage to the operating companies, but only to the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company." And he and his colleagues, with an air of extreme unction, endeavor to pose as benefactors before this downtrodden portion of humanity, by telling them how jealously they are guarding their interests, and in them and them only will the miners find a bulwark against that devouring vampire, the railroad company.

This must cause every fair-minded person to ask why the operators are seeking to reduce wages 20 per cent. when they themselves have only been reduced 10 per cent. Their purpose is twofold. First, they were determined the cut should be large enough to insure the miners rejecting it and thereby precipitate a strike; and, second, that there should be ample margin for a favorable compromise, in which event their position would be benefited. The operators made no secret of this, but spoke it openly.

We are next told by Mr. Harman that the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad hauls coal the same distance, charging only such freight rates as to net the operators a handsome profit. But he should have given us more data to enable a comparison to be made between the haulage cost on the two roads. If the coal on the Chesapeake and Ohio is hauled over such grades as from Clifton Forge to Richmond, no wonder their rates are lower. But where have they such grades as the following: Vivian up the summit to east end of tunnel; Graham to Bluefield; Belspring; that east of Christiansburg, and the one east of Roanoke, climbing up the Blue Ridge slope? All of which require two heavy freight engines to each train of 12 or 14 loaded cars. With such grades as these the Chesapeake and Ohio would not be anything below the Norfolk and Western in freight rates.

Mr. Harman then meekly informs us that "they have made money at the old prices." I should say they have. Witness the broad acres and luxurious farms; superb residential property, valuable coal lands, iron furnaces, and other extensive investments now owned by men who six or seven years ago came to this field with only two or three thousand dollars and are to-day worth half a million each. But, says Mr. Harman further, "to sell coal for 65 cents per ton (I presume he means 65 cents, and that 95 is a typographical error) and pay the same wages as formerly would cause them all to close out their business." But why seek to reduce wages 20 per cent. when only 10 per cent. is called for? Your rapid accumulation of wealth would not be as prodigious as before, but you must not expect it to be; you must live and let live. And as for it

forcing you out of business, I happen to know something of the coal business, and what I say is this, those operators in this field who have made the coal-mining business the business of their life and properly understand it (I don't include those raised in the whisky or merchandise business), having a fair average thickness of coal seam and a reasonable supply of cars, and are not able to put their coal on the railroad cars at from 50 to 60 cents per ton, ought to go out of the business at the earliest possible date, and let their trade be absorbed by those operators who are mining coal at those figures. With the cost of mining at 55 cents f. o. b. there is still a profit of 10 cents per ton; add to this the profits of the commissary, mine supplies, and house rents, and what does it amount to? You won't tell as I know. But you tell us that one of the high officials of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company has stated that "the store business produced profits enough, and that the operators should be satisfied with the commissary gains alone, but the operators claim that such is by no means the case." Well, that goes to show he is a wide-awake official, and has posted himself on both sides of the question. Then Mr. Harman becomes very ridiculous by saying "the railroad shares a large part of the store profits by having recently raised freight rates from the markets to the coal field 40 per cent." Store profits should not be considered as such until freight charges have been taken into account. But, Mr. Harman, suppose before we leave this subject of commissary profits, which you have stated are very moderate and a large share of which is devoured by the railroad, suppose now you give us a list of a few of the articles you buy and sell to the miners, together with the rate of profit, beginning with, say, blasting powder, which you are buying delivered at your mines, after the railroad has got its freight, at \$1 per keg, and which you sell to the miners at \$2.75, a profit of 175 per cent., and flour which you are buying delivered, after the railroad company has got its freight, at \$3.75 a barrel, and which you sell to the mines at \$7 and \$8, a profit of 87 per cent. to 113 per cent., and numerous other articles yielding the same rate of profit; and please, don't forget your house

rents, or I should say, "shack" rents, which range anywhere from \$5 to \$8 per month, and cost you from \$100 to \$150 to build, yielding a profit of 60 per cent. Mr. Harman, if you believe man has got a soul, that is destined for a future existence of misery or happiness, according to his doings in this life, what sort of a time of it do you imagine you and some of your associates are going to have for growing fat on the destitution of others? But perhaps you don't believe in such back-number fables, but have implicit faith in the potent balm of Bob Ingersoll when the final twinge comes.

We are next informed by Mr. Harman that their employees are not compelled to deal at the company's store, but are perfectly free to go to other stores. If a canvass was made of this whole coal field how many fellow operators disposed to be truthful would indorse Mr. Harman's statement? Not one. And how many of the thousands of employees could indorse it? Not one. But it must not be supposed that a notice is posted warning the men to do all their trade in the company's store. Oh, no. Nor do the operators have it specified in their book of rules that they must return their earnings back through the commissary. Certainly not. But various and subtle are the means employed to gain their purpose. And woe unto the poor fellow who at the month's end has too much money coming to him, and has not spent to the satisfaction of the company's storekeeper.

The failure of the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company, says Mr. Harman, "is due entirely to their unprofitable branch lines and not to the hauling of coal at low rates." Then he means to say the statement submitted by the company to their stockholders is not true. Now, to convince Mr. Harman his opinion is not shared by the world at large, I give him the following from a review of the London stock market: "The Norfolk and Western receivership did not have as discouraging an effect as many expected, since the cause of that company's troubles was pretty well understood. At any rate the company has been frank with its security holders and showed evidence of an intention to do right, in marked contrast to the doubtful transactions which marked

the Reading bankruptcy, and the more than doubtful dishonesty shown in the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé." So the European stockholders had faith in the veracity of the company. And for further demonstration of their truthfulness let us search for evidence nearer home, and what do we find? A railroad company with its enthusiasm aroused and energies sustained in a conviction of the unbounded mineral wealth of the vast section of country it controlled, doing all in its power to foster and develop its industries, removing every obstacle to the expansion of trade, and keeping its haulage charges down to the lowest possible limit. Mr. Harman himself does not forget how often during the severe depression of trade that followed the iron furnace companies along the line asked for concession after concession to enable them to continue their declining business, and which were promptly made until a point was reached below which it would have been ruinous to go. And when the last concession was asked for the railroad company positively stated that unless part of it was borne by the operators supplying coke they could not make it. And what a mournful wail passed through those operators when asked to do this, although at that time they were making a profit of 7 to 12 cents per ton on their coke, not including commissary profits and house rents accruing from their coke department. And what has been the result of such generous policy on the part of the railroad company which was extended to the coal trade as well? Financial embarrassment and vituperation and abuse from those who were assisted in amassing princely fortunes.

Aftersight is always surer than foresight, and the railroad company, being only human, may have undertaken things which, as proved by subsequent events, were not wise. But where does the man exist so endowed with prescience that he can tell with exact precision what is going to happen? So, therefore, the work of a critic is very simple, but his work is not complete until he has suggested an alternative remedy.

Deliberate aim is next taken at our nerves by Mr. Harman in informing us the agitation amongst the miners is "very strong" and their organization "thorough." And then he

makes the absurd statement that "this state of affairs was brought about entirely by the proposed use of electrical mining machines by the six companies referred to." Perhaps if he would, Mr. Harman could give us some interesting details concerning this organization amongst the miners. It is certainly to be hoped Mr. Harman and his associates will in the near future find this organization a little too strong and thorough for the smooth running of their commissary and three-ton mine cars, and their evasion of the scale law.

Mr. McBride and his fellow agitators must have been amazed on their recent arrival in the field at the altered condition of things, by finding themselves received with smiles and allowed to hobnob with the operators. Very different treatment from that they received in this field last Summer during the northern strike, when they were chased from operation to operation by a gang of armed toughs, and on one occasion one of their party was waylaid at night and "sand-bagged" by a paid hireling of one of the operators. But the agitators are now here, and it is more than probable they will leave some lasting footprints behind them. But how successfully the agitators and miners are being gulled and hoodwinked by the subtle operators, who, after throwing dust in their eyes, are pouring into their ears every kind of false reasoning, arousing their passions and prejudices and directing them on to the railroad company. Down with the railroad company is the slogan of these valiant men. Close down the mines, is their cry, and victory is yours; then this oppressive railroad company, with its perfidious Receivers, wreckers of our fortunes and yours, will be no more! And while these poor, misguided men are under the excitement of this din and clatter, the cunning operators are stealthily drawing into the background such burning grievances as their commissary, mine cars, and scale question, and thereby diverting this long-expected uprising into another channel, and making the railroad company the scapegoat.

Surely these misguided men will not be long before they tear this bandage from their eyes and see daylight once more, and realize they are treading a dangerous pathway. If they

do not, there is but one end to it—they will find themselves poorer and more destitute every day, and, finally, have to return helpless and impoverished to the bondage of their old taskmasters, who will stir their fires and heat their pincers afresh for another long term of cruel oppression. Is there then no possible escape for these men from such a wretched existence? There is but one, and that is to first turn a deaf ear to their present evil counsellors, quit their cruel bondage forever, and seek a place where a better reward will meet their honest toil. There are five of the largest operations where no cut in wages is being made, and whose men have therefore no cause for complaint. These five mines, if worked to their full capacity can accommodate all the miners of the region and furnish all the coal the market needs. There will be no broken time and the car supply good and constant, and greater than all is the advantage of being paid the old rate of wages. No 20 per cent. cut at these mines. On May 1st, when the strike began, it was expected these five mines would continue at work, but owing to the exertions of Mr. Harman and his fellow operators the miners at four of these mines were so intimidated they dare not go to work. One of these mines was not expected to work, for although the owner had declared it should work and no cut be made in wages, some of his under officials were known to be in sympathy with the striking operators. The result was that only one operation started work, the southwest mines at Pocahontas, and continued until last Monday, when, as a result of a strikers' meeting the day previous (Sunday), many of their men were induced to stay at home. That mine is working, but with a reduced number of men; the company claims, however, that large numbers of other miners have applied for work, and that unless the absentees return at once they will be paid off and new men put in their places.

Mr. Harman concludes his so-called "review" by predicting the strike will be "quite a durable one," and then treats us to a lot of balderdash about the miners having considerable money and able to retire to the country to hunt and fish. It is quite possible the strike may prove a very durable one

to those operators who are solely responsible for it, and they, instead of the miners, may have an opportunity of retiring to the country to hide their heads in shame and chew the cud of their reflections. If they are compelled to remain there and close up their business in the coal field, so much better for the coal field and the community.

But the strike is not going to last very long at the mines of those operators who have acted with gentlemanly decency, and it will not be long before they are joined by numerous deserters from the camp dominated by Mr. Harman and his clique. Harmony does not prevail amongst them by any means, and many of the operators were only brought into line by the strongest kind of coercion. For a long time they have been restive under an unbearable despotism, but now they see many of their associates besmeared with treason and conspiracy of the very worse kind they will leave their ranks in disgust. Add to this the force of public sentiment when it has grasped the whole truth of this matter, and the awakening of the miners to the way in which the seductive operators have led them astray, and that will see the last of what will hereafter be known as the "Operators' Strike of 1895."

JUNIUS.

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A review of the Pocahontas strike and its causes from the operators' standpoint.

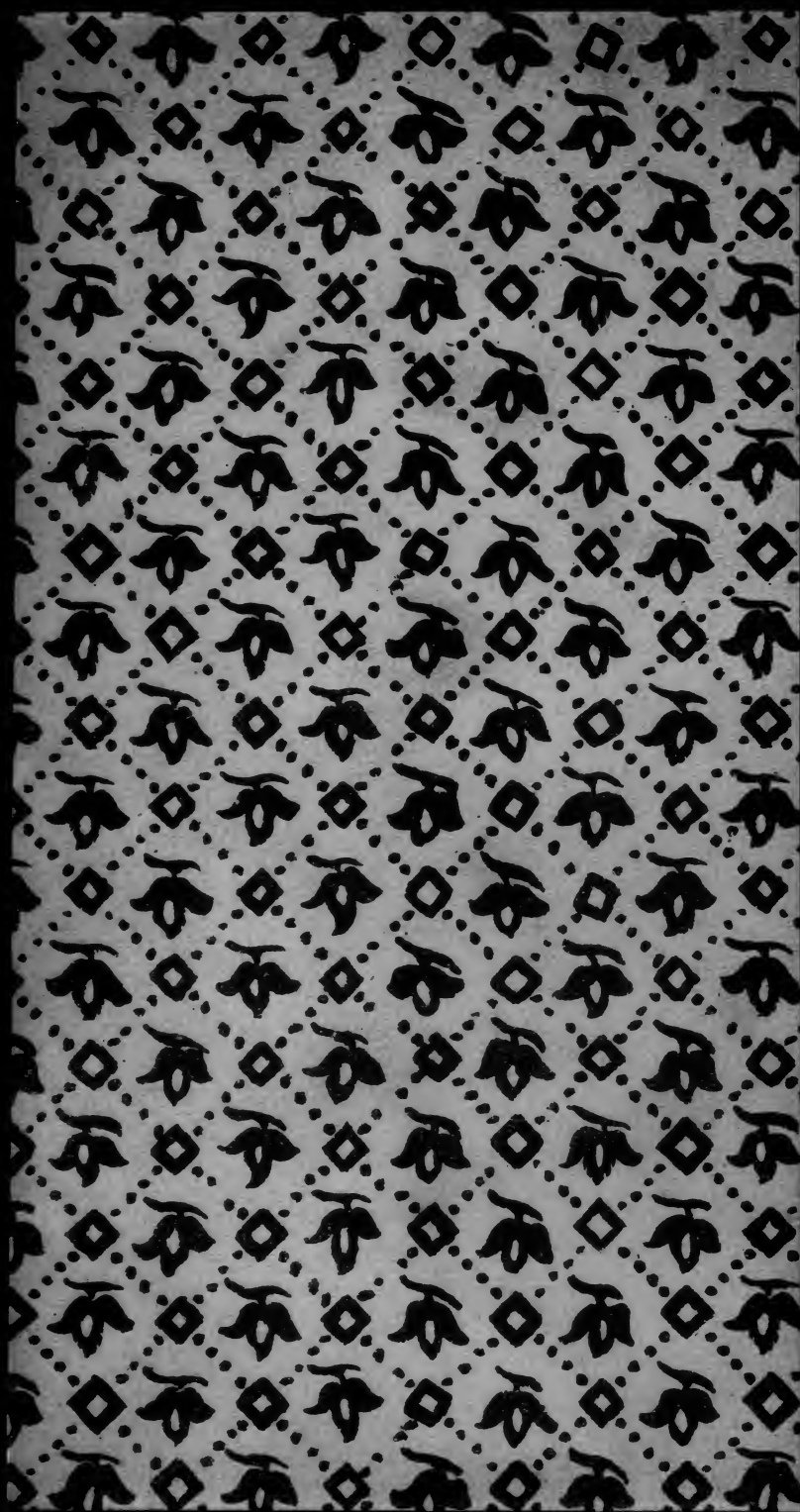
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